

DRAFT

MEPA/NEPA/23-1-110 MCA CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action:

Grazing Lease

2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3. Name of Project:

Kootenai-Woods Ranch WMA/Stoddard Grazing Agreement

4. Name, Address, and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency): N/A

5. If Applicable:

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date:

May 15, 2007

Estimated Completion Date:

October 1, 2012

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): N/A

6. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range, and township):

Lincoln County, R26 and 27W, T37N

7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

Acres		Acres	
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	_____
residential.....	_____		
industrial.....	_____	(e) Productive:	
		irrigated cropland	_____
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	_____	drv cropland	_____
		forestrv	300
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	_____	rangeland	900
		other	_____

8. Map/site Plan: Attach an original 8½" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.

See the attached grazing plan and map.

9. Listing of any other local, state or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction: N/A

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
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(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
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(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
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10. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

The proposed action will allow cattle to graze on the Wildlife Management Area in coordination with the lessee's own pastures to maximize forage benefits for wildlife in both areas. A local rancher will provide the 90-100 cow/calf pairs for a maximum of 400 AUMs annually and will be assessed the established DNRC annual rate for grazing on State Lands. Cattle will graze grass produced during the growing season and be allowed to graze the WMA after seed ripe on a rotational basis. Cattle will be rotated between four pastures, three on the WMA and one on the operator's land (see the attached grazing plan). The duration of the plan will be for six years (two complete grazing cycles). Benefits include an increase in the quality of grasses produced on the WMA, which are primarily nonnative. Wintering deer, elk, and bighorn sheep will benefit from the improved quality of vegetation and stimulation of fall regrowth during the critical winter and spring seasons.

11. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

None

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		x				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?			x			1b
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		x				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		x				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1b. The small amount of cattle (90-100 pairs), given the size of the area to be grazed on the WMA (approximately 1,200 acres), will not cause any measurable damage to soils, except possibly where cattle concentrate to travel and locate water.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))		x				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		x				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		x				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		x				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		x				
f. Other:						

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		x				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		x				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		x				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		x				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		x				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		x				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		x				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		x				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		x				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		x				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		x				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		x				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. VEGETATION	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			x			Index 4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?		x				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				4c
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		x				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		x				4e.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		x				
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4a. The grazing design should increase productivity and abundance of most grass species located on the WMA. Some loss in grass biomass may occur.

4c. No rare, threatened, or endangered plant species are known to be located within the boundaries of the pastures.

4e. The grazing system should reduce the spread of noxious weeds by increasing the productivity of several grass species.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

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** 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		x				5a.
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			x			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		x				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		x				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		x				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		x				
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)		x				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		x				
j. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

5a. The grazing system should improve the quality of habitat for wintering wildlife.

5b. Production of fall regrowth may cause an increase in the number of deer, elk, and bighorn sheep on some portions of the WMA during the winter and spring seasons.

5f. Although grizzly bears, wolves, and bald eagles may occasionally visit this WMA, no adverse effects to these species are expected. It is possible a few Columbian sharp-tailed grouse may still persist in this area. If so, there may be a minor negative effect on nesting cover. However, under the rest rotation system that is planned, at least 2/3 of the WMA will always be available for nesting purposes.

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B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		x				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		x				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		x				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		x				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		x				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		x				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
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- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		x				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		x				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		x				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		x				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		x				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		x				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		x				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		x				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		x				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		x				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?			x			10b
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		x				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		x				
e. **Define projected revenue sources			x			10b
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.		x				10f
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10b. The lessee will be assessed an annual grazing fee by FWP, charged per AUM while on the WMA, which will be equal to the DNRC established rate for that given year. For example, in 2007 this fee will be \$7.87/AUM.

10f. Currently, fences are in relatively good condition. In the future, some minor fence repair will be needed, but is to be completed by the lessee. MFWP will provide all fencing materials. Wire from old fences no longer in use is a problem on the WMA for both livestock and wildlife. FWP has agreed to remove this wire prior to May 15, 2007. A small amount ($\pm 1/4$ mile) of new fence construction in the orchard area may be necessary. This will be built at FWP's expense.

** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		x				11a
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		x				11a
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)		x				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		x				
e. Other:						

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

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Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11a. The WMA is located in a rural setting. However, people like to visit the orchard area of the WMA for a view of the Tobacco Valley. Given the history of cattle grazing on the WMA, the presence of cattle will not be something new for the public. All cattle will be removed prior to the opening of the general big game hunting season.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		X				
e. Other:						

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

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** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CONTINUED)

2. **Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no-action alternative) to the proposed action, whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider, and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

No-Action Alternative: Grazing would not take place and no benefits would be observed to remove decadent vegetation and to stimulate fall regrowth of vegetation for wintering wildlife. The lessee will not be able to allow his pastures adequate rest, which will affect forage production and potential use by livestock and wildlife.

Proposed Alternative: Allow grazing of cattle on the WMA and lessee's pastures for the duration of the grazing plan (six years) to aid in vegetation management, remove decadent vegetation, and to stimulate fall regrowth of grass to benefit wildlife, primarily during the winter months.

3. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:** None

PART III. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required (YES/NO)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

No. No significant impacts are anticipated.

2. **Describe the level of public involvement for this project, if any, and given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

The draft EA will be available to public on the FWP web site (fwp.mt.gov under Public Notices) and a legal ad will run in the local newspaper.

3. **Duration of comment period, if any:**

Fourteen days, from March 14 through March 28, 2007.

4. **Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:** Tim Thier, FWP Area Biologist

P.O. Box 507
Trego, MT 59934
(406) 882-4697
tthier@interbel.net

Woods Ranch WMA/Stoddard Ranch Grazing Plan

2007-2012

The grazing agreement between FWP and Jay Stoddard (Eureka) would be for a 6-year period beginning May 15, 2007, and extending to October 1, 2012. This agreement would involve approximately 1,200 acres on the Woods Ranch WMA and 277 acres of Stoddard pasture being grazed and managed cooperatively to maximize benefits for wildlife. This agreement would incorporate a rest-rotation system that would allow for complete rest of each of the three WMA pastures every third year. In addition, it would allow the Stoddard pasture adequate rest during the growing season in order to develop a healthy root system and enhanced plant vigor.

The Stoddard property is one of the most intensively used private ranches by mule deer in NW Montana. In addition, it receives considerable amounts of use by turkeys, elk, and white-tailed deer. A cooperative grazing system will enhance grass palatability and availability for wintering ungulates for both areas. The Woods Ranch WMA is critical winter habitat for elk, bighorn sheep, and mule deer.

Under this agreement, cattle would be grazed on these two parcels according to the schedule outlined below. In exchange for grazing on the WMA, Mr. Stoddard would pay FWP the DNRC established rate for AUMs or Animal Unit Months. This amount varies from year to year and in 2007 will be \$7.87/AUM, or cow/calf pair. Mr. Stoddard would be allowed up to 400 AUMs annually on the WMA. Mr. Stoddard would also be responsible for routine fence maintenance. FWP would be responsible for cleaning up wire from old fences that is currently a hazard to both wildlife and livestock.

Kootenai/Woods Ranch/WMA – Stoddard Ranch grazing rotation schedule, 2006-2012

YEAR	WMA2+Stoddard	WMA3	WMA1
2006	*A	C	B
2007	B	A	C
2008	C	B	A
2009	A	C	B
2010	B	A	C
2011	C	B	A
2012	A	C	B

*A=Livestock grazing from May 15 to August 1.

B=Livestock grazing from August 1 to October 15. In a year when the Stoddard pasture is scheduled for the B treatment, the landowner can graze later than October 15 at his discretion (Stoddard pasture is a planted grass field).

C=Rest for the entire year. When the Stoddard pasture is scheduled for the C treatment, the landowner may graze it from October 15 into the late fall at his discretion.

NOTE: The Stoddard pasture is important wildlife habitat as evidenced by the frequent use it receives from large numbers of mule deer and wild turkeys. To be attractive to wildlife it requires frequent grazing because the pasture consists of planted exotic pasture grasses (i.e., smooth brome, etc.). The grazing plan provides for frequent growing season rest, yet allows livestock to frequently graze it to maintain palatability. We have successfully used this grazing approach on agricultural fields on other WMA projects. The intent is to manage these fields more like one would a hay crop than native range.

MENT OF AGRICULTURE
REST SERVICE

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